

# Tigers in the Fuselage

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Tigers in the Fuselage  
Introduction  
Chapter 1: The Ascent  
Chapter 2: The Fury  
Chapter 3: Awakening to Horror  
Chapter 4: The Gathering Storm  
Chapter 5: Whispers in the Dark  
Chapter 6: The Breach  
Chapter 7: Flames of Defiance  
Chapter 8: The Longest Hour  
Chapter 9: Dawn's Redemption  
Chapter 10: The White Room  
Chapter 11: Echoes in the Concrete  
Chapter 12: Scars of the Delta  
Conclusion

## Introduction

In the heart of the Sunderbans, where the earth's veins pulse with brackish water and the air hangs heavy with the secrets of ancient mangroves, the line between civilization and wilderness blurs into a treacherous haze. This vast delta, home to the world's largest mangrove forest and its most cunning predators, has long been a realm of myth and peril, where human ambition collides with nature's unforgiving laws. "Tigers in the Fuselage" plunges readers into this shadowy world, weaving a tale of survival that begins not

on solid ground, but in the fragile cocoon of a commercial airliner slicing through the stormy skies above the Bay of Bengal. Here, ordinary lives—software engineers chasing dreams, families on holiday, businessmen sealing deals—are thrust into an extraordinary nightmare, testing the limits of human resilience against the raw instincts of the wild.

At its core, this novella explores the primal clash between technology's illusions of safety and the untamed forces that lurk beyond our control. Through the eyes of diverse characters like the steadfast Captain Arvind Singh, the resourceful Vibha Jha, and the unyielding survivors who band together in the wreckage, we witness how fear strips away societal veneers, revealing the raw humanity beneath. Drawing on the real dangers of the Sunderbans—infamous for its man-eating Bengal tigers and treacherous terrain—the story transforms a routine flight into a harrowing odyssey of terror, camaraderie, and defiance. As the night unfolds in the twisted metal of the fuselage, readers are invited to confront their own vulnerabilities, pondering what it means to fight back when the jungle comes calling.

Yet, amid the darkness, "Tigers in the Fuselage" is a testament to the indomitable spark of hope that flickers even in the face of oblivion. It reminds us that survival is not merely about enduring the body's trials, but about forging unbreakable bonds in the crucible of adversity. Prepare to embark on a journey where the roar of engines gives way to the growl of beasts, and where the true monsters may lie not in the shadows outside, but in the doubts within.

## Chapter 1: The Ascent

Location: Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, Kolkata

Time: 22:05 IST

The air inside the terminal at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport was a physical weight, heavy with the specific, cloying humidity of a Bengali pre-monsoon night. It smelled of floor wax, stale filtered coffee, and the damp, earthy scent of rain that had fallen hours ago but refused to evaporate. Outside the expansive glass walls, the tarmac glistened under the harsh wash of sodium-vapor floodlights, turning the puddles into pools of molten orange.

Passengers for FlyVoot Flight FV-217 to Singapore shuffled through the jet bridge, a tube of suspended reality connecting the solid ground to the aluminum bird that would carry them across the Bay of Bengal. The Airbus A320 sat waiting, its fuselage painted in the airline's signature cheerful yellow and blue livery, a stark contrast to the oppressive grey of the night sky. The auxiliary power unit (APU) hissed with a high-pitched whine, a sound that vibrated in the teeth of those standing too close to the open cabin door.

Inside the cockpit, the atmosphere was one of controlled precision. Captain Arvind Singh, 42, adjusted his seat, the leather creaking softly. He ran a hand through his salt-and-pepper beard, his eyes scanning the array of lit buttons and digital displays. With over 20,000 flight hours, the cockpit was more home to him than his apartment in chaotic Mumbai. The panel was a constellation of green and amber lights, each signifying a system ready for duty.

"Checklist complete to the line," stated First Officer Anika Sharma. At 32, she was sharp, ambitious, and meticulously professional. Her

uniform was crisp, her epaulets gleaming under the overhead map lights. She tapped the weather radar display. "Captain, the weather update just came in. We have a significant low-pressure system developing over the central Bay. Tops are reaching 45,000 feet. It's going to be a slalom run."

Arvind leaned forward, squinting at the radar. The screen was a digital tapestry of greens and yellows, with ominous cores of deep red pulsing near their flight path. "Nothing we haven't danced with before, Anika. Monsoons are like old friends—unpredictable, loud, but eventually, they let you pass. We'll ask ATC for a deviation to the east if the cells build up."

He keyed the intercom, his voice shifting into the smooth, baritone register practiced by pilots worldwide to induce calm. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is your Captain speaking. Welcome aboard FlyVoot FV-217 with service to Singapore. We are looking at an on-time departure. Flight time is a quick four hours and ten minutes. We do have some weather en route, so keep those seatbelts fastened even when the sign is off. Sit back, relax, and let us take care of the rest."

In the economy cabin, the symphony of boarding was reaching its crescendo. Overhead bins slammed shut with hollow thuds. The chime of the call button pinged repeatedly.

Vibha Jha, a 28-year-old software engineer, squeezed into seat 15F. She was vibrating with a mix of caffeine and anxiety. This was her first solo international trip, a milestone for her career as she headed to a tech conference to present on AI ethics. She smoothed her jeans, checked her Apple Watch for the third time, and pulled a noise-canceling headset from her bag. The cabin smelled of

sanitized recirculated air and the faint, sweet scent of duty-free perfume wafting from a passenger passing by.

Next to her, Mr. Wei Tan, a 55-year-old businessman, was already loosening his tie. He wore a charcoal suit that had seen better days, the fabric wrinkled at the elbows. He smelled faintly of cigarettes and mints. "First time to the Lion City?" he asked, his voice gravelly but kind. Vibha jumped slightly, pulling one earcup back. "Oh! Yes. For work." "You will like it," Mr. Tan smiled, eyes crinkling at the corners. "Efficiency is our religion. But the food... that is our soul. You must try the Chili Crab at East Coast Park. It's messy, but worth it."

Several rows back, in row 22, the Patel family was a whirlwind of activity. Ravi, a doctor with a penchant for order, was trying to organize the overhead luggage like a game of Tetris. Meera, his wife, was already dispensing hand sanitizer and wet wipes. "Arjun, put the phone away during takeoff," Ravi instructed, his voice rising over the hum of the engines. "Dad, I'm in airplane mode," Arjun, 16, groaned, his thumbs flying across the screen as he sent a final Snapchat of the wing. Beside him, 14-year-old Maya was quiet, her sketchbook open. She was drawing the passenger in front of her—the curve of a headrest, the tuft of hair sticking up. She loved the aesthetics of travel; the way the lights dimmed, the focused beams of reading lamps cutting through the dark.

The cabin crew, led by Lena Wong, moved with practiced grace. Lena, 35, wearing the airline's signature yellow scarf, locked the galley carts. Her face was a mask of professional calm, though her eyes betrayed a hint of fatigue. She whispered to Rahul, a junior flight attendant, "Check row 12 again. That bag is not all the way under." Rahul nodded, rushing past. "Captain says it might get bumpy, Lena. Do we serve the hot meals immediately?" "Wait for